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Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 007089

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE TEMPORARY ASYLUM CENTER: CALL
ON PRIME MINISTER LEE BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN

REF: A. SINGAPORE 106 B. STATE 006176

MANILA FOR DERIAN; SINGAPORE FOR OAKLEY

1. DEPARTMENT REMAINS HOPEFUL THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE CAN
BE PERSUADED TO ACCEPT UNHCR GUARANTEES OF BEST EFFORTS AS
A SUFFICIENT BASIS FOR OPENING OF A TEMPORARY ASYLUM CENTER
FOR INDOCHINESE BOAT REFUGEES IN SINGAPORE. WE BELIEVE
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PRIME MINISTER LEE'S INSISTENCE ON "BANKABLE GUARANTEES,
IS A REFLECTION IN PART OF UNHCR'S INABILITY IN PAST TO
PLACE ALL REFUGEES IN TIMELY FASHION AND LEE ALSO STATED
DURING HIS WASHINGTON VISIT THAT UNHCR HAD FUNDING PROB-
LEMS IN PAST. ON "LATTER COUNT THE GOS APPEARS TO BE SATIS-
FIED THAT THE UNHCR HAS ADEQUATE FUNDS FOR A REFUGEE CENTER,
AND THE DEPARTMENT FOR ITS PART ANTICIPATES NO DIFFICULTY

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ON FUNDING SIDE.

2. THERE IS GREATER DIFFICULTY WITH THE CONCEPT OF A 'BANK-ABLE GUARANTEE" REGARDING REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT. LEE IS DOUBTLESS AWARE THAT PRECISE, ADVANCE GUARANTEES FROM THIRD COUNTRIES TO RESETTLE INDOCHINESE WHO ARRIVE IN SINGAPORE WOULD TAKE MONTHS TO OBTAIN AND COULD PERHAPS HAMSTRING OR PREVENT THE OPENING OF THE REFUGEE CENTER. THE USG CAN MAKE NO ADVANCE GUARANTEES ABOUT ACCEPTANCE OF INDO-CHINESE PENDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LONG-TERM INDOCHIN-ESE REFUGEE POLICY. THE FRENCH THOUGH CONSISTENTLY GENER-OUS IN ADMITTING REFUGEES CANNOT PROVIDE ADVANCE GUARANT-EES. IN ABSENCE OF FRENCH AND U.S. GUARANTEES IT IS DIF-FICULT FOR UNHCR TO PLACE ENTIRE BURDEN ON OTHER NATIONS.

3. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT UNHCR GUARANTEE IS HOLLOW. ON THE CONTRARY, DEPT. IS CONVINCED THAT SINGAPORE WILL NOT BE STUCK WITH ANY REFUGEES. WHILE WE CANNOT BE PRECISE ABOUT OUR FUTURE PROGRAMS, THE UNITED STATES IS NOW SEEKING AD-DITIONAL EMERGENCY PAROLE FOR BOAT REFUGEES AND IS IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A LONG-TERM APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM. THE FRENCH, AUSTRALIANS AND CANADIANS ARE CONTINUING THEIR PROGRAMS. THUS WE BELIEVE THE CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUING RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES BY THE UNHCR REMAIN FAVORABLE. THE UNHCR RECORD OF RESETTLING BOAT REFUGEES HAS BEEN IM-PRESSIVE IN RECENT PAST AND SHOULD BE VERY REASSURING TO CONFIDENTIAL

GOS.

4. WE WISH TO PRECLUDE GOS USING LACK OF SPECIFIC ADVANCE GUARANTEES AS BASIS FOR NEGATIVE DECISION ON ESTABLISHING REFUGEE CENTER. IF GOS WISHES TO PROTECT ITSELF, PERHAPS THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATAGEM WOULD BE TO LIMIT THE INITIAL SIZE OF THE CENTER UNTIL THE UNHCR PROVES TO GOS THAT REF-UGEES FROM THE CENTER CAN BE EXPEDITIOUSLY RESETTLED ELSE-WHERE. A CEILING OF SEVERAL HUNDRED REFUGEES COULD BE INITIALLY ESTABLISHED THEREBY PROTECTING THE GOS FROM OPEN-ENDED RISK. THE CEILING COULD BE RAISED AFTER UNHCR DEMON-STRATES ITS EFFECTIVENESS.

5. DEPT. SUGGESTS THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN MAKE FOLLOWING POINTS WITH PM LEE (SUPPLEMENTED BY TALKING POINTS ALREADY PROVIDED IN DERIAN'S BRIEFING MATERIAL PREPARED IN DEPT.):

A. THE UNITED STATES IS APPRECIATIVE OF THE OFFER BY GOS TO PERMIT THE UNHCR TO ESTABLISH A TEMPORARY ASYLUM CENTER IN SINGAPORE FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES.

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B. WE APPRECIATE THE DESIRE BY GOS TO AVOID EITHER INCURRING COSTS OR A RESIDUE OF NON-RESETTLED REFUGEES. UNHCR IS IN A POSITION TO GUARANTEE FUNDING OF THE REFUGEE CENTER AND ITS BEST EFFORTS TO RESETTLE ALL INDOCHINESE USING THE CENTER.

C. THE USG AND OTHER GOVERNMENT WOULD WORK IN CLOSE COORDINATION WITH THE UNHCR TO INSURE THAT NO REFUGEES WOULD REMAIN IN-COUNTRY. THE UNHCR RECORD TO DATE IS IMPRESSIVE: OVER 10,000 BOAT REFUGEES HAVE BEEN GRANTED PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT SINCE AUGUST 1977 AND IT IS NOT CONTEMPLATED THAT ANY COUNTRY OF TEMPORARY ASYLUM WILL BE LEFT WITH UNWANTED BOAT REFUGEES.

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D. THE OTHER COUNTRIES GRANTING TEMPORARY ASYLUM HAVE ACCEPTED UNHCR GUARANTEE OF BEST EFFORTS.

E. (IF LEE RAISES) WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT GOS WOULD PREFER PRECISE GUARANTEES IN ADVANCE THAT THE REFUGEES WILL BE RESETTLED IN A TIMELY FASHION. THIS WOULD BE AN EXTRAORDINARY REQUIREMENT WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO CHANGES IN THE POSITION OF OTHER COUNTRIES OF TEMPORARY ASYLUM AND WOULD MAKE OPENING OF A CENTER PROBLEMATIC. IF GOS DUBIOUS ABOUT UNHCR GUARANTEE OF BEST EFFORTS, WE RECOMMEND THAT THE GOS PLACE AN INITIAL CEILING ON THE CAPACITY OF THE REFUGEE CENTER OF SEVERAL HUNDRED REFUGEES. THE UNHCR WOULD THEN DEMONSTRATE ITS CAPABILITY TO RESETTLE REFUGEES WITHOUT OPEN-ENDED RISK TO SINGAPORE.

F. (IF LEE RAISES) WE WOULD NOT WANT TO HOLD UNHCR TO A STRICT TIME LIMIT IN PROCESSING REFUGEES. MOST CASES WOULD BE PROCESSED WITHIN A FEW MONTHS; SOME MIGHT TAKE LONGER. HOWEVER, OPERATIVE CONSIDERATION TO GOS IS THAT EXPENSES OF REFUGEES WHILE IN SINGAPORE WOULD BE UNHCR RESPONSIBILITY AND THAT ULTIMATELY ALL REFUGEES WOULD BE PERMANENTLY RESETTLED ELSEWHERE.

G. THE OPENING OF A REFUGEE CENTER IN SINGAPORE WOULD BE A CONCRETE DEMONSTRATION OF SINGAPORE'S CONCERN FOR THIS GRAVE HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM AND WOULD BE OF ASSISTANCE IN ILLUSTRATING TO OUR CONGRESS THAT MANY COUNTRIES IN AND OUTSIDE THE REGION ARE SHOULDERING THE BURDEN OF COPING WITH THE INDOCHINA REFUGEE PROBLEM. VANCE

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